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legend "made in Austria." The Nâyars wear none but the gold, "mounted" as they call it (the mounting being much as the upper portion of one section of the necklace, in the plate), strung together through the mounting just as the necklace: a very effective ornament for the neck. The brass imitations of the sequin are worn by the women of the inferior races of whom we shall have some description hereafter. If one asks the ordinary Malayali, say a Nâyar, what persons are represented on the sequin, one gets for answer that they are Rama and Sita; between them a cocoanut tree!

Turkish coins, French half louis, and German 10 mark pieces are also used in the same way, each one being known by a distinctive vernacular name, and no corruption of its nomenclature in European coinage, so that it is always easy to identify one of these coins by its vernacular name. For instance, every Malayali knows what an "Amâda" is: it is what we know to be a real or imitation Venetian sequin.* The half louis of the empire is known as the "pakshikkas," probably from the eagle on the reverse. And so on.†

Ornaments are never worn on the ankles or on the waist, as is the rule in other parts of Southern India.

Dress, men.—This is very simple; ordinarily one cloth round the loins, the ends overlapping a foot or two in front. It is not tucked between the legs, which is the fashion practically all over India, but hangs straight to the ground. It should touch the ground, or very nearly do so. Wearing a cloth in such fashion carries with it dignity to the wearer. A Tîyan, or a man of any inferior

* I have never heard any explanation of the word Amâda in Malabar. The following comes from Tinnevelly: "Amâda was the consort of Bhagavati and he suddenly appeared one day before a Shânár (the caste devoted to climbing the palms and drawing off the juice) and demanded food. The Shânár said he was a poor man with nothing to offer but toddy, which however he gave in a palmyra leaf. Amâda drank the toddy and performing a mantram over the leaf it turned into gold coins which bore on one side the pictures of Amâda, the Shânár and the tree; and these he gave the Shânár on a reward for his willingness to assist him. This explains the two names—Shânár caste (as they are called in Tinnevelly, but where they are not very common), and Amâda."

† It is scarcely right to say any of these coins, even the sequin, is not current. The value of each is known everywhere to a nicety. It must be remembered that throughout Malabar copper coins of the English and Dutch East India Companies, of Mysore, and of almost every former dynasty of South India are to be found amongst the coins actually current with the people, while in the rural parts reckoning is always in fanams: not in annas.

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custom is one which makes for improvement of the race, bound up as it is with the Marumakkattâyam system, which, guided by the anulômam principle, has fewer hindrances in the way of natural selection than perhaps any other marital custom throughout the world.

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The divine commands of Srí Parasu Râma, the imputed originator of the Marumakkattâyam system which is followed by 70 per cent. of the people of Malabar, are supposed to be contained in the Kêrala Mâhâtmyam, a work in Sanskrit verse, written on the ordinary Malabar grantham (palm-leaf book). It purports to be a monologue "addressed by the Rishi Garga to Yudhishthira the eldest of the Pândus." Chapter XLIX relates "how certain celestial damsels were brought from Indra's world by Parasu Râma to satisfy the sexual cravings of the Kêralam Brâhmans, and it relates how Parasu Râma at Vishabhadri (Trichûr), pronounced his commandment to the women (not being of the Brâhman caste) to satisfy the desires of Brâhmans, enjoining on them to put off chastity and the cloth which covered their breasts, and declaring that promiscuous intercourse with three or four men in common was void of the least taint of sin." Unfortunately no scholar has given his opinion as to the time when this was written. Most likely it is not very ancient, and may be attributed to device of the Nambûtiris. But it is respected as authoritative. "One of the foremost Nambûtiris in Malabar in respect of wealth, rank, sanctity and learning," in common with the rest of his clan, relied absolutely on it, and informed the Commission: "The Smiriti says the Sûdras' appointed path to heaven is serving the Brâhmans." "The practice of Brâhmans . . . . . having sexual intercourse with servile (Sûdra) women is in accordance with the Sástras." "If a Brâhman wished to have sexual intercourse with a Sûdra's wife, the Sûdra would be bound to gratify the wish." "A Sûdra cannot be sure of the true parentage of the children born of his wife. Hence the Sûdras cannot follow Makkattâyam"—inheritance in the male line. The Zamorin Maharajah Bahadur informed the Commission that "according to Parasu Râma . . . . chastity should not be observed by non-Brâhman females." Again, the "Ettan Tamburan," one of the senior members of the Zamorin's family, a learned Sanscrit scholar said: "It has been ordained by Parasu Râma that in Kêrala, Marumakkatâyam women need not be chaste;" and he quoted a sloka in proof that there

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the Nâyar would be cut down instantly with a sword: 564
there would be no words. Now that the people of India 783
are inconvenienced with an Arms Act which inhibits [656]
sword play of this kind, and with a law-system under [178]
which high and low are rated alike, the Nâyar has to [201]
content himself with an imperious grunt-like shout for
the way to be cleared for him as he stalks on unperturbed.
His arrogance is not diminished, but he cannot now show
it in quite the same way.

Doubtless the natural habit of seclusion common to 771
Malabar, rendered easy by the wealth of vegetation of
which those who have never visited shores somewhat
alike climatically can have no conception, has favoured
the persistence of earlier forms of belief; but, whatever
may be the reason for it, there is much more of the
extremes of religious belief to be seen amongst the
Nâyars than amongst any other people or caste of
Southern India.

It has been noticed already how that the Malayalis [795]
have, practically, no sects such as obtain throughout the
rest of Southern India. Vishnu, Siva, Bhagavati, Rama—
all these names of the Hindu theogony are meaningless
to them. They do not know one from the other except in
name. Their Hinduism is not that of the rest of South-
ern India.

It is time to come to concrete example, so I will 796
attempt a description of the ceremonial observed at the [773]
Pishâri kâvu—the Pishâri temple near Quilandy on the
coast 15 miles north of Calicut, where Bhagavati is sup-
posed in vague legend to have slain an Asura or
gigantic ogre, in commemoration of which event the
festival is held yearly to Bhagavati and her followers.
It is fairly representative. The deity of the temple [776]
Bhagavati is spoken of as feminine in the spirit of accu-
racy, but it is extremely unlikely whether ten per cent.
of the crowd even thought of sex in connection with
Bhagavati. Sacrifice of goats as part of the ceremonial [782]
was at first denied: it is a mystery too awful to be the
subject of conversation. At the same time, I am inclined
to think that much the weighter reason is that the priests
who cling to this part of the ceremonial are ashamed to
let it be known to the people that they do it. They like
it to be thought that such sacrifice is appropriate to the
inferior races, but that *they* are above it and have nothing
to do with it!

The festival lasts for seven days. When I visited it
in 1895 the last day was on the 31st of March. Before

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"Immediately the day dawns the heads of the families give to almost all the junior members and servants of the household and to wives and children, money-presents varying from 4 as. to a rupee or two. Children preserve these presents to serve as their pocket money. In the more numerically large families similar presents are also made by the heads of particular branches of the same family to their juniors, children, wives and servants. These presents are intended to be the forerunners of incomes to them more splendid all the year round.

"But one other item connected with the festival deserves mention. On the evening of the previous day, about four or five o'clock most well-to-do families distribute paddy or rice, as the case may be, in varying quantities with some other accessories to the family-workmen, whether they live on the family-estates or not. In return for this, these labourers bring with them for presentation the fruits of their own labours such as vegetables of divers sorts, cocoanut oil, jaggery, plantains, pumpkins, cucumbers, brinjals, &c., in ways such as their respective circumstances might permit.

"With the close of the noon-meal the festival practically concludes, and nothing remains of it for the next day or for the same evening, for that matter. In some families after the noon-meals are over, dancing and games of various kinds are carried on, which contribute to the enhancement of the pleasantries incidental to the festival. As on other prominent occasions, card-playing and other games are also resorted to."

"THE THIRUVATHÎRA FESTIVAL.

"Thiruvathira is one of the three great national occasions of Malabar. It generally comes off in the Malayalam month of Dhanu (December or January) on the day called the Thiruvathira day. It is essentially a festival in which females are almost exclusively concerned and lasts for but a single day. The popular conception of it is that it is in commemoration of the death of Kamadevan, the Cupid of our national mythology. As recorded in the old Puranas, Kamadevan was destroyed in the burning fire of the third eye of Siva, one of the chief members of our Divine Trinity. Hence he is now supposed as having only an ideal or rather spiritual existence, and thus he exerts a powerful influence upon the lower passions of human nature. The memory of this unhappy tragedy is still kept alive amongst us, particularly the female section, by means of the annual celebration of this important festival. About a week before the day, the festival practically opens. At about 4 in the morning every young female member of Nair families with pretensions to decency, gets out of her bed and takes her bath in a tank. Usually, a fairly large number of these young ladies collect themselves in

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754 object to be milked; how to cure a headache; to prevent
812 bad dreams, and so on.

N.B.—A mantram must be spoken, breathed, whispered with extreme accuracy. There must be no omission or false accent. Anything of the kind, or wrong pronunciation, destroys its efficacy at once.

FAMOUS MAGICIANS OF MALABAR.

791 We will close this chapter on magic which, though painfully inadequate, is already rather too long for its purpose, by mention of some of the famous workers in the art. Those who are familiar with the west coast will at once recall to mind the names of three Brâhman families whose scions are famed throughout the land as possessors of stores of magic, and at the same time—so interwoven is magic with religion!—revered for their saintliness. The eldest member of one of these is said to be "an honoured guest throughout the length and breadth of Kêrala; and on certain State occasions in Trevandrum and elsewhere, his presence is indispensable." A well-known tradition relates how that magic came, so to speak, into the family. (It is not necessary to give the family name, even though it is a household word on the west coast).

● 773 791 776 Long ago in the days of the Perumals, a Brâhman and his friend were belated in the Yakshi paramba (*yakshi*—female demon, *paramba*—garden) near Trichur.* The place was dreary; nothing but palms around. Suddenly they were accosted by lovely damsels who asked them to pass the night under their roof, and soon they were lodged in a sumptuous house, each in a separate chamber. But in the night, the damsels who had, *Lorelei* fashion, attracted the travellers, resumed their demoniacal forms and ate the Brâhman. His friend they could not touch as he had on his person a grandha sacred to Bhagavati; but in the morning he found himself perched on the top of a palm tree underneath which lay the bones of his friend, the Brâhman.

The Brahman's widow gave birth to a son soon after the strange death of her husband. When the boy was eleven years of age, she related to him how he had been made fatherless. He vowed vengeance on the Yakshis and Gandharvas (male demons) and, like a sensible boy, set about preparation for his life-task. It was not long before he had mastered the Vedas and all learning, and having done so he retired to the jungle, where he was

* To this day people avoid this place at night.

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engaged in prayer and meditation for seven years. His devotion so pleased Surya, the sun god, that he appeared before him in human form and handed him a grandah, which is to this day the greatest work on magic in existence. The kind attention of the sun god accounts for the prefix " Sûrya " to the family name.

Now well equipped, he made war on the Yakshis and Gandharvas, and compelled the Yakshi who had devoured his father to appear before him. She begged for mercy, offering to serve him faithfully. But he would have none of her and made her enter the sacrificial fire, and she was consumed. Then her Gandharva lover turned up, most inconveniently, and cursed the Brahman magician to suffer death on the forty-first following day. It was now the magician's turn to beg for mercy, and the Gandharva, more merciful than the Brahman had been to the Yakshi, extended it to him. On one condition, however, that on the forty-first day he would worship at the Alangât Tiruvalore temple in expiation. Naturally, he went to fulfil it, and preparatory to worshipping, descended into the temple tank to bathe. All at once he was seized with delirium and raved like a maniac, biting the wooden beams of the bathing shed. He died after enduring frightful agonies. The marks of his teeth are to be seen to this day! Moral—Don't meddle with magic.

Another famous magician was by caste a Ravuthan (a class of Tamil Muhammadans of which there are a few on the west coast) who died about 30 years ago. The story is that having been turned out of his father's house, he was in sad plight, when, awaking from sleep under a tree, a white-bearded Rishi * confronted him and presented him with a grandha of magic, which he put to such good use that he died a very wealthy man. Here are two authenticated stories from the families of Nâyars of good position whom he assisted in each case.

(1) A Nâyar lady, having lost several children in infancy, sought the magician. He came to her house, and asked for a common mud pot, a fowl, some rice and some pepper. With what formality is not said, but the fowl (alive?), the rice and the pepper were put into the pot, which was buried in the ground under the lady's cot. Every day, she ate some of the rice and pepper, and in due time produced a daughter who is now living.

(2) Nearly every young Nâyar woman wears a talisman, protective against evil spirits. The Ravuthan

* It is rather comical, a Rishi appearing to a Muhammadan! Again the queer mixture of religious ideas.

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up in the marriage shed and the rites are conducted before it. Among Nayars it is planted near the sacred corner-post which as we saw is probably a phallic symbol. Among Tiyyars a small branch of the tree is tied to the marriage-pole, thus indicating, perhaps, that Bhagavadi is being 'married' to the divine male tree. The girl is seated upon a plank of the milk-tree. Among Nayars the *tāli*-rite is followed by offerings to appease the angry mother.

Bhagavadi or Devi (generic terms meaning goddess) is equated by Nayars and Tiyyars with Durgha and with Kali or Bhadrakali, fierce puranic goddesses who were created by Siva and are his consorts, though, unlike Parvathi his 'regular' wife, they are not represented as actually married to him. Bhadrakali is a black, hideous-faced demon; she is encircled with snakes, has a garland of skulls, four hands holding weapons, long claws and tusks, a protruding tongue, and a mouth dripping blood. She rides upon a lion. She is said by Nayars to have been born from fire which issued in anger from the third eye of Siva to destroy the sacrifice which Daksha, Siva's father-in-law, had prepared for the other gods to the exclusion of Siva himself. Bhadrakali destroyed the sacrificial objects and beheaded Daksha.

Durgha (who is often not distinguished by Malayalis from Kali) rides on a tiger and has ten hands holding weapons. These were given to her by the gods as emblems of their power, to enable her to kill Mahisasura, a buffalo-demon who had gained control of the worlds of gods and men. Both Durgha and Kali have destroyed, beheaded, dismembered, and eaten many other demons in their wars on behalf of the gods.

Other myths of Bhagavadi temples describe the goddess's devotion to Siva and attacks on demons who opposed him. In the myth of the temple at Cape Comorin, Bhagavadi is a virgin with eight brothers who divided between them the kingdom of Bharatha Kandam. Bhagavadi took the southernmost portion round Cape Comorin. Here she did penance to Siva and, when he promised her a boon, desired to copulate with him. He replied that she must first kill Vanasuran, a demon who, by excessive penance to Siva, had gained control of the earth. Vanasuran heard of Bhagavadi and came to marry her. He found her as a beautiful maiden swinging in her garden. She requested him to bring her the flowers of three kinds of fig tree, but, when he did so, she caused them to disappear.[1] Seeing she would not yield, Vanasuran took his sword and fought the virgin who, appearing in terrible form, pierced him with her own sword and cut off his head with her disc. His body disappeared in a hole in the earth, from which sprang a bathing-pool called *chakkra-therttham* ('disc-water').

Bhagavadi is represented by Nayars and Tiyyars both as a mother and as a virgin. The dead Nayar or Tiyyar virgin can, moreover, herself become a species of Bhagavadi. It was formerly believed that if a girl died before the *tāli* was tied, her jealous and malignant spirit hovered round the earth inflicting misfortune on her *tarawād*. She was called a *Kannichāru* ('dead virgin'); a shrine must be erected to her and offerings made by her kin. It is this curious equation of the mother and the virgin which leads me to believe that the virgins for whom the *tāli* is tied (and who are associated with Bhagavadi in the rites) are also unconsciously likened to the mother.

I suggest an interpretation of the Bhagavadi myths which subsumes under one theory both the myths and the *tāli*-rite. That Bhagavadi is their chief deity reflects the supreme importance of the mother in the life of the Nayar and Tiyyar man. The myths show repressed hostility to and fear of the mother which, because of the values of the kinship system, cannot be made conscious and expressed openly in social life. That Bhagavadi dismembers and eats the demons reflects the infant's projection upon the mother of his own oral frustrations in the period of suckling (commonly prolonged to the age of three or four, but abruptly terminated if a sibling is born) and his desire to attack and tear to pieces the mother. Bhagavadi's snake ornaments, weapons, projecting tongue, tusks, claws, and lion and tiger

[1] One of the trees was the *Ficus religiosa* (see p. 54).

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vehicles, indicate that she is a phallic mother, the 'mother with a penis' who is a common phantasy for European children too. It is well known that in the unconscious minds of Europeans, the phallic mother usually and perhaps always represents the mother armed with the father's penis, which she has acquired in an act of sadistic intercourse. The infant's fear of approaching her sexually thus becomes a fear of being attacked and castrated by the angry penis of the father which the mother has taken as her weapon. In the myths the demon may in each case be interpreted as a son-figure, for in each case he acquires power as a devotee who does penance to Siva, the father-god in the Tamil and Malayalam countries. The son attacks the mother sexually, but she is pre-armed by Siva or by the other gods with their weapons. In some myths she uses their phallic symbol, the sword (a common castration symbol), to behead the demon-son. In the myth of Vanasuran she pierces the demon with the sword and then kills him with her disc. I associate being killed by means of this circular weapon with being castrated by the vagina in intercourse, and the disappearance into the hole with annihilation by being swallowed up in the mother's body, a phantasy which we see too in the fear of being eaten by the mother. Behind this fear may lie an unconscious desire to return to the womb. This interpretation is likely because bathing in the *chakkra-therrtham* at Cape Comerin is a means of becoming pure from sin, and purificatory bathing, a common rebirth symbol.

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I suggest that the fear of deflowering a virgin issues from this association of her with the phallic mother since, like the mother, she is still in the possession of her lineage kinsmen and defended by their sexual organs, which (in phantasy) they or she may use to castrate or attack an aggressor. We saw how, in the Nayar rite, the lineage men in fact attack the bridegroom with 'phallic' missiles (plantain fruits) and how the ritual play with swords suggests a sexual attack and defence.

A further reason why the *tâli* must be tied before puberty may be that the menstruous woman is particularly closely associated with the mother, menstrual blood (see the blood-dripping mouth of Bhadrakali) recalling the infantile phantasy of parental intercourse as a sadistic attack by the father in which the mother is wounded and bleeds, but castrates him and acquires the penis. A virgin who had menstruated but was still in the possession of her lineage kinsmen would thus be too terrifying a creature to deflower. This may be why a woman who matured before the *tâli* was tied (i.e. before she was symbolically deflowered and removed from the sexual protection of her kinsmen) was considered irrevocably polluting, a creature to be driven from caste and with whom it would be madness to cohabit. It was therefore desirable to make her attain puberty fictitiously in advance by the mock menstruation ceremony, and then actually or symbolically to deflower her before she was in fact mature. Even so, the bridegroom must be a polluted low caste person, whose ritual purity could not be further endangered, or a father-figure to the society at large, or a small boy whose act appears innocuous, or a woman on behalf of her son.

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My association of the menstruous woman with the phallic, blood-dripping divine mother rests on the fact that, like the goddess, she is 'sacred' and may not be approached; that she is armed with a knife to ward off evil spirits; and that she is credited with the power to make men impotent (castrate them) if they foolhardily copulate with her. It must be noticed too that the obscene songs sung by the washermen at a Nayar or a Tiyyar girl's first menstruation are sung on another occasion, namely the annual Bharani festival to the Bhadrakali of Kodungalur temple in Cochin. In this festival the temple, normally closed to the 'polluting' castes below Nayars, is for seven days flung open to them and deliberately polluted. On the day previous to Bharani, Nayar and low caste pilgrims, drunk with toddy, armed with long staffs, and carrying live cocks, flock in thousands to the temple from all parts of Malabar. On the road they sing obscene songs to the goddess and revile in filthy language women whom they meet.

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high above his reach unless, of course, there is something near by on which he could climb. He cannot untie a knot, as he does not possess fingers, though he can open the strongest lock. What rich people do to keep their money out of his reach is to tie a knot on the purse and keep it locked in a safe, the latter precaution being necessary against human hands that possess fingers.

Kutti Chattan can, of course, be tamed by magicians and bribed to do whatever his patrons like. There is a story that a Brahmin landlord who was also a magician tamed a *Kutti Chattan* and used him for the purpose of keeping a watch on his things. A Christian tenant of his who had gone to pay the rent, not knowing the existence of the invisible and mysterious detective, stole certain things and took them home with him. But lo! *Kutti Chattan* had followed him, and the man was found dead next morning, and the stolen things were in their place. Such is the power of *Kutti Chattan*, the household elf of Malabar.

Whether the practices here narrated and the belief in the existence of a "naughty elf" amount to religion depends very much upon the definition we give to it. Though they are distinctly social and possess social sanction, I do not think it can be called religion, because there is a fundamental difference in the emotional and psychic aspects of religious experience and practice, and such social beliefs and customs as I have described here.

But side by side with this there also exists "black magic," sinister, selfish, and anti-social. It is fast disappearing, more as a result of economic pressure than because of any growing disbelief in it. A young man has no time now to devote himself entirely to sacrificing goats and birds all night and chanting formulæ so that he might become possessed of magical power. Those young men who have devoted themselves to such practices are, however, looked upon with great fear. The community does not like such practices, and though these magicians may excite fear, they are also aware of the general belief that they will some day come to a disastrous end.

Their practices are carried on in secret and nobody knows what they do except those initiated. Their assistance is procured only by people who want to do harm to others or satisfy ignoble desires. A man often gets the help of a magician of this sort to perform his "art" so that an enemy of his who is gone on a pilgrimage may not return. They are avoided by all decent people, and society in general, though it fears their "art," considers them charlatans.

There are many minor superstitions that can be only briefly noticed here.

The Evil Eye.—The magical effect of the evil eye is a matter of very serious concern among Nāyar women. I remember being taken to task for telling a woman how healthy her boy looked, and must add that I felt as if I had been convicted of a heinous crime when four or five days later I was told that the child was ill. The entire feminine opinion of the village was convinced that the child was suffering from my evil eye, and a good many *mantrams*, or magical formulæ, were said over it before the child was well again.

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death. At ten or twelve years of age of a girl, her mother begged some one of their relations to marry her, and they did so by tying a mariage badge (*tali*). Then the bridegroom would leave her and go away without any consideration of his new relationship. She might also remain with him if he wished it. If she was not inclined to do so, the mother would then go about seeking some one to take her daughter to live with him. If the girl happened to be pretty, three or four Nayars would agree to live with her, and the more lovers she had, the more highly was she esteemed. Each man had his appointed time from midday to the next day at the same hour, during which some signal was placed at the door so that the others might not enter. She was at liberty to dismiss whomsoever she disliked. The advantage of this system was, that a man, who had not the means to support a wife, might have only a share of the cost of the maintenance. Nevertheless, there was a difficulty in ascertaining the fathers of children, who generally lived with the mothers by whom they were brought up. The fathers, in such cases, were named by the mothers. It is said that the kings made this law in order that the Nayars might not abandon their service. According to this system, the fathers were not succeeded by their sons but by nephews (sons of sisters). The above is a summarised account from 'The Travels on the East coast of Africa and Malabar' by Duarte Barbosa, from those of Lodovico Varthema, as also from the voyage of Frankoy Pyrard, page 371.

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Origin of the custom of polyandry.

The orthodox view or rather the traditional account according to the *Keralamahatmyam*,[1] is that certain celestial damsels were brought from the world of Indra by Parasurama to satisfy the sexual cravings of the Kerala Brahmans; and that at Vrishabhadri (Trichur), he pronounced his commandment to the *Sdmanthan* and *Sudra* castes to gratify the desires of the said Brahmans, ordering them to put off chastity and the cloth which covered their breasts, and declaring that promiscuous intercourse with three or four men in common was devoid of the least taint of sin. This is certainly a very convenient arrangement for the junior members of the Nambuthiri families to be relieved of their life-long bachelorhood (*Bramhacharyam*) without any

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1. Malabar Marriage Commission Report, page 17.

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upon with contempt. It must be noted that they live separately, having little or nothing in common with the other classes, and that the institution is dying a silent and natural death.

Songs.— There have been very many songs current among the Nayars even from a very remote period; and they are chiefly composed and sung in honour of deities, and are mostly prayers addressed to them. A translation of these is not here attempted, for they lose much of their beauty, but the following, however, are the most important of them:—

Bhadrakali Pattu:—These are songs which are sung in honour of Káli, and are supposed to have been composed by the Sudras of Palghat long before the Malayalam era. Certain dramatic songs also appear to have been composed about the same time, and refer to the deities on the hills as well as to the kings of the period. They are sung in towns and villages, between Anamala and Trichur in the east, and the Walayar forests on the other side. The ancient name of these localities was Cheranad, and it was the first place to be occupied by people, when Kerala was a marshy tract. As evidence of this, remains of houses are still to be seen at the foot of the hills. In a place of such historic importance were composed and sung these songs, which are so full of the ideas of the Vedanta and Yoga philosophies, and which give a clue to the nature of the people who once lived there. There is also another variety of songs referring to *Dárikavadham*, (murder of the demon Dárikan), and they are sung by a class of men called the *Kurippans*. There are also other old songs such as the *Sásta pattu* (songs in honour of Sásta).

Ganapati pattu (songs in honour of Ganapati) and serpent songs:—Among the old songs, those referring to agriculture, and composed during the third century of the Malayalam era, occupy a prominent place, and the agriculturists of the northern parts of the State even to-day follow the precepts laid down in these songs. But excepting, the song commemorating the deeds of *Meppayil Kunji Othenan*, the Robinhood of North Malabar, there are no songs which sing of the deeds of brave men.

The chief festivals.—(1). *Onam*:—This is an important national festival, which falls in the second half of August or the first half of September, and is celebrated in commemoration of Mahábali, an *Asura* king, whose reign is believed

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796 to have been a period of uninterrupted peace, plenty, and pros-
● 773 perity. Growing jealous and apprehensive of the glory and greatness of this great king, the Dévás entreated Vishnu to quell the pride of this earthly potentate; and Vishnu, thereupon, appeared as *Vámana* (dwarf, his fifth incarnation) to request him for a plot of three feet of earth. The prayer was readily granted by the sovereign, who found to his cost that he could not satisfy him; for, large as his kingdom was, it was found to be very small when measured by the *Vámana*, who eventually placed his foot upon his head and pushed him down to the regions below. Grieved at the loss of their dear king, his subjects prayed to Vishnu to allow him to re-visit the earth once a year, and this is popularly believed to happon on the *Tiruvónam* day.

796 The festival is celebrated in honour of his re-appearance, and with it the return of happy days. It is practically confined to four days which are observed as holidays throughout Kérala, and people of all ranks from the prince to the peasant acknowledge them as such. Ten days before *Tiruvónam*, signs of the approaching festival are visible in every Nayar house, which, by its neatness and cleanliness all around, puts on a gay appearance. A portion of the front yard of the house, opposite to the store-room, is selected, and there a temporary stall of mud is put up for the royal visitor to sit upon. Flowers are strewn over it and on the night previous to the auspicious
[537] day, pyramid-shaped images of the king made of wood or clay, called *Trikkákarappan*, are placed upon it amid the deafening cheers of the members of the family who assemble at the gate to greet him. *Pujas* are daily made both in the morning and evening before the inmates take their meals, and this con-
[431] tinues up to the closing of the festival. In respectable families the festival opens with the presents of cloths by the *kárana-vans* to the junior members of the family as well as to other close relations, servants, and others. This is also the occasion when tenants make gifts of curry-stuffs, chiefly banana, for the celebration of the festival, and they are often rewarded with
796 cloths and also fed. A feast is held on a large scale, all the
574 four days, while the essential element in it is the consumption of
[262] bananas or *nentranpazham*. The fruits are cut into two or three pieces, boiled in water, and are eaten alone or with *pappadam*.

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796 184 come off, therefore, either in the latter part of Kumbham or in the former part of the next following month of Meenam according as the new moon in Kumbham occurs earlier or later. The festival is said to be celebrated in commemoration of the victory obtained by the local deity, Bhadrakali, widely known by the local designation of Chittur Bhagavati, in a battle fought with the Kongans, the people of what was known in ancient days as the 'Kongu Desam' comprising the localities included in the present British District of Coimbatore, and lying to the north and east of the Chittur Taluk. The final engagement was fought in the eastern out-skirts of the present town of Chittur, and in it the Kongu chief called in the old songs by the simple name of 'Kongan' was slain by the Goddess with her own hand. The place of engagement is now marked by a small extent of rocky surface, on which is cut the figure of the Bhagavati's sword with which Kongan's head was cut off. The rock also shows two holes nearly a foot in depth, and six inches in diameter. These holes are pointed out by old people as having been made by the hoofs of the fore-legs of the Kongan's mount, which is described as a magnificent buff-bull, when the animal jumped on to the rock in the excitement caused by the fall of its master from its back slain by the Goddess. The buff-bull was also slain on the spot. The whole of the Kongu army was completely routed, and all stampeded to their country in utter confusion. In the course of the battle a few men on the side of the Bhagavati were also killed or wounded, among whom were four important persons belonging to four ancient families in Chittur, who appear to have been the leaders of the local militia. The dead bodies of these four and the wounded were taken from the field of battle and carried to the town and handed over to the respective families, the procession being led by the Goddess, who afterwards commanded the people to celebrate the victory every year, and after entering the temple disappeared into her image within. Tradition speaks thus of the origin of the war. The wealth of the 'Kongu Desom' chiefly consisted of chillies, turmeric, coriander, cumin seed, mustard, areca nut, etc. These commodities used to be exported for sale, in return for paddy, from Kongu Desom to Chittur, Palghat, and other places in large quantities

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belief in animism, and all these are largely mixed up with the religion of the Nayars. Animism refers to the belief that man passes through life surrounded by a ghastly company of powers, elements, and tendencies, impersonal in character, mere shapeless phantoms of which no image can be made and no idea can be formed. Most of these have departments or spheres of influence of their own—one presides over cholera, another over small-pox, yet another over cattle disease, some dwell in rocks, others haunt trees, and others again haunt rivers, whirlpools and waterfalls. All of them require to be diligently propitiated by reason of the ills and calamities which they bring about, and the essence of these practices is magic.

Evidence of a wide-spread belief in the worship of ancestors is to be seen in the kistavens (*thoppi kallús*)—the rock caves containing the sepulchral urns found in the jungles and other parts of the State—in the ceremonies performed and the offerings made for the spirits of the dead. They are worshipped even now in special *kóvús*, sometimes even in small out-houses or special rooms in the house on new moon days or *Sankrántis*, and there are also periodical commemorations on the anniversaries of the ancestor's death. Dead ancestors are also represented by stones or small images of gold or silver kept in the middle room of the Nayar houses, and offerings of food and drink are made to them on new moon and *Sankránti* nights. Animistic again is the worship of Káli or Bhagavati who presides over small-pox, cholera, and the thousand maladies that flesh is heir to, the worship of animals and plants and lastly the belief in exorcism and witchcraft in which Brahmans also share.

Serpent worship.

Serpent shrines (*Núgattún kávús* or *Nagakóttas*) are to be found in the compounds of every Nayar house in the Cochin State, and their worship occupies a prominent place in the religious life of the Nayars and other castes. The following mythical origin is ascribed to the adoration of serpents in the Keralólpathi.

The first Aryan colonists settled by Parasurama found Kerala absolutely uninhabitable, and finding it impossible to improve their condition, returned to their old country. After their departure, the Nágas (or serpent gods) of the lower world or *Páthála* took possession of the partly reclaimed land and settled

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773 778 825 [776] thereon. The early colonists, on a second venture, finding the land occupied, commenced a war against the Nágas, but Parasurama acting as arbitrator, decided in favour of the early colonists, and ordered that they should set apart a corner of every compound as an abode of the serpent gods. He further ordained that these allotted places were to remain virgin-ground, untouched by the blade of the knife or the prong of the fork, while the under-wood and the creepers were to be allowed to grow in wild profusion, and to such the name 778 *kávu* (grove) was given. In it are generally planted several 771 825 stone idols of serpents placed on a stone-basement called *chitrakúdam*, the whole being held sacred and reserved by a low wall round it to prevent cattle or children straying into [782] that space. The propitiation of serpents is deemed essential [753] to the prosperity and well-being of every house-holder, and periodical offerings are made to them, while the neglect of [776] these is considered to cause leprosy, sterility, or ophthalmia, among the members of the family. These serpents are therefore regarded as tutelary deities of the family, and the gods along with the shrines are conveyed with the property and frequently specified in deeds of transfer.

793 795 778 825 [782] The high priest of the serpent cult is the Pámbu Mékkát Nambuthiri, who lives in a house full of cobras which are said to be harmless to his family. Whenever an image of a serpent from a grove has to be removed from one place to another, he is sent for on the belief that he alone can do it after due propitiation and offerings, and any tree that is cut down for this removal must be sent to the local temple to be used as fuel. [564] [841] [783] The serpent grove should not be polluted by a member of the low caste, or by a woman during her menses; and when it is so polluted or otherwise spoiled, a member of the family of the Nambuthiri priest has to be informed. He gazes into a [787] vessel filled with oil, points out the evil and suggests the remedy. 771 778 825 [841] [782] [532] The ninth asterism in every month is specially selected for snake worship in Nayar families, when offerings of milk and water are made to them. It is said that the approach of a woman during her menses will cause serpents to vacate the grove because of the impurity, and Pulluvans are required to sing songs and perform certain ceremonies to cause them to re-enter the shrines. Images of these serpents are sometimes

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made even of gold or silver and consecrated for worship in 778
Brahman houses. They are also presented to Brahmans by 825
those on whose date of birth an eclipse falls, and this is done [532]
to mitigate the wrath of Ráhu.

Cases of snake bite are of frequent occurrence in the 755
northern parts of the State where snakes abound; and nowhere 759
else is the Hindu treatment so skillfully practised as to effect [787]
a radical cure by medicines and incantations. When information regarding snake bite isconveyed to a physician, or a bitten man is taken to him, the latter can, by the chirping of a lizard or other tokens, make out the nature of the case and also whether it is curable or not. It is said that physicians should 755
not go to a patient's house, and the following story is given in 759
explanation :— 773

Once when the emperor Parikshit was ordained to be bitten by the great serpent Takshaka, the latter set out in the disguise of a Brahman. On his way he met another Brahman, who, on enquiry, turned out to be a physician on his way to cure the king. With a view to test his ability, Takshaka bit a tree which was at once reduced to ashes, but the physician removed the poison, and the tree regained its former state. Takshaka, admiring his ability, loaded him with immense wealth and dissuaded him from going to the king. He also made him promise that he should never volunteer his services in such matters unless patients were taken to him. In some [428]
families the profession is hereditary, the most prominent among them beingt he families of Kokkára Nambuthiri and Máliyakal Karta.

In every village are to be found guardian deities that pro- 776
tect the villagers from the malevolence of demons which are supposed to occupy an intermediate place between gods and men. The temples of the [778]
Nayars in which are enshrined these village deities or *Gráma-dévatas* are far less imposing than those of the Brahmans and are callad *kávus*. The deities commonly represented are the consort of Siva or some manifestation of that female divinity, and Ayyappan or Sasta; and these are supposed to keep in subjection the demons and spirits which are ever prone to do harm to the people of the village. Thus, though the demons are objects [782]
of worship, the propitiation of the guardian deities and the festivals held in their honour are considered to be sufficient to curb

Tutelary deities.

796 526 [184] would seem to be a relic of the days of the Roman pugiles using the cestus in combat. The position taken up by the combatants is much the same as that of the [175] pugiles. The Romans were familiar with Malabar from about 30 B.C. to the decline of their power.* We may safely assume that the 3,000 lbs. of pepper, which Alaric demanded as part of the ransom of Rome when he besieged the city in the fifth century, came from Malabar." Swinging on the uzhinjal, and dancing to the accompaniment of merry songs, are said to be characteristic amusements of the womankind during Ōnam festival, and, on the Patinaram Makam, or sixteenth day after Thiruvonam. This amusement is indulged in by both sexes. It is noted by Mr. Fawcett that "the cloths given as Ōnam presents are yellow, or some part of them [431] is yellow. There must be at least a yellow stripe or a [194] small patch of yellow in a corner, which suggests a relic [198] of sun-worship in a form more pronounced than that which obtains at present. It is a harvest festival, about the time when the first crop of paddy (rice) is harvested."

796 Concerning another important festival in Malabar, the Thiruvathira, Mr. T. K. Gopal Panikkar writes as follows.† "Thiruvathira is one of the three great national occasions of Malabar. It generally comes off in the Malayālam month of Dhanu (December or January) on the day called the Thiruvathira day. It is essentially a festival in which females are almost exclu- [176] sively concerned, and lasts for but a single day. The [773] popular conception of it is that it is in commemoration of the death of Kāmadēvan, the Cupid of our national mythology. As recorded in the old Purānas, Kāmadēvan

* See Thurston. Catalogde of Roman, etc., Coins, Madras Government Museum, 2nd ed., 1894.

† Malabar and its Folk, 1900.

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was destroyed in the burning fire of the third eye of Siva, one of the chief members of our divine Trinity. Hence he is now supposed to have only an ideal or rather spiritual existence, and thus he exerts a powerful influence upon the lower passions of human nature. The memory of this unhappy tragedy is still kept alive among us, particularly the female section, by means of the annual celebration of this important festival. About a week before the day, the festival practically opens. At about four in the morning, every young female of Nair families with pretensions to decency gets out of bed, and takes her bath in a tank. Usually a fairly large number of these young ladies collect at the tank for the purpose. Then all, or almost all of them, plunge in the water, and begin to take part in the singing that is presently to follow. One of them then leads off by means of a peculiar rhythmic song, chiefly pertaining to Cupid. This singing is simultaneously accompanied by a curious sound produced with her hand on the water. The palm of the left hand is closed, and kept immediately underneath the surface of the water. Then the palm of the other is forcibly brought down in a slanting direction, and struck against its surface, so that the water is completely ruffled, and is splashed in all directions, producing a loud deep noise. This process is continuously prolonged, together with the singing. One stanza is now over along with the sound, and then the leader stops awhile for the others to follow in her wake. This being likewise over, she caps her first stanza with another, at the same time beating on the water, and so on until the conclusion of the song. All of them make a long pause, and then begin another. The process goes on until the peep of dawn, when they rub themselves dry, and come home to dress

In some families, after
796 the meal is over, dancing and games of various kinds
526 are carried on, which contribute to the enhancement of
535 the pleasantries incidental to the festival. As on other
[524] prominent occasions, card-playing and other games are also resorted to."

264 On the subject of religion, Mr. Fawcett writes as
515 follows. "No Nāyar, unless one utterly degraded by the exigencies of a Government office, would eat his
782 food without having bathed and changed his cloth. It
783 is a rule seldom broken that every Nāyar goes to the
[512] temple to pray at least once a day after having bathed;
[564] generally twice a day. The mere approach anywhere near his vicinity of a Cheruman, a Pulayan, or any inferior being, even a Tiyan, as he walks to his house from the temple, cleansed in body and mind, his marks newly set on his forehead with sandal-wood paste, is pollution, and he must turn and bathe again ere he
[683] can enter his house and eat. Buchanan tells us that in his time, about a century ago, the man of inferior caste thus approaching a Nāyar would be cut down instantly
[656] with a sword; there would be no words. Now that
[671] the people of India are inconvenienced with an Arms Act which inhibits sword play of this kind, and with a
[178] law system under which high and low are rated alike, the Nāyar has to content himself with an imperious grunt-like shout for the way to be cleared for him as he stalks on imperturbed. His arrogance is not diminished, but he cannot now show it in quite the same way.

796 "I will attempt a description of the ceremonial
[773] observed at the Pishāri kāvu—the Pishāri temple near Quilandy on the coast 15 miles north of Calicut, where Bhagavati is supposed in vague legend to have slain an Āsura or gigantic ogre, in commemoration of which

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event the festival is held yearly to Bhagavati and her followers. The festival lasts for seven days. When I visited it in 1895, the last day was on the 31st of March. Before daybreak of the first day, the ordinary temple priest, a Mūssad, will leave the temple after having swept it and made it clean; and (also before daybreak) five Nambūtiris will enter it, bearing with them sudhi kalasam. The kalasam is on this occasion made of the five products of the cow (panchagavyam), together with some water, a few leaves of the banyan tree, and darbha grass, all in one vessel. Before being brought to the temple, mantrams or magic verses will have been said over it. The contents of the vessel are sprinkled all about the temple, and a little is put in the well, thus purifying the temple and the well. The Nambūtiris will then perform the usual morning worship, and, either immediately after it or very soon afterwards, they leave the temple, and the Mūssad returns and resumes his office. The temple belongs to four taravāds, and no sooner has it been purified than the Kāranavans of these four taravāds, virtually the joint-owners of the temple (known as Urālas) present to the temple servant (Pishārodi) the silver flag of the temple, which has been in the custody of one of them since the last festival. The Pishārodi receives it, and hoists it in front of the temple (to the east), thus signifying that the festival has begun. While this is being done, emphasis and grandeur is given to the occasion by the firing off of miniature mortars such as are common at all South Indian festivals. After the flag is hoisted, there are hoisted all round the temple small flags of coloured cloth. For the next few days there is nothing particular to be done beyond the procession morning, noon, and night; the image of Bhagavati being carried on an elephant to an orchestra